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NSC BRIEFING

19 June 1957

THAILAND

- I. Trouble may be brewing in Thailand, where reported split in ruling oligarchy has given rise to rumors of a possible coup d'etat, or which is more likely a no-confidence motion against Premier Phibun when National Assembly convenes on 24 June.
 - A. Present split has Phibun siding with Interior Minister Phao in an effort to stem the growing power and popularity of Defense Minister Sarit, who seized opportunity during early March post-electoral crisis to pose as popular champion of democratic rights and undermine Phao, his long-standing rival.
 - B. Sarit, who controls adequate forces to stage a military coup and may have sufficient backing among the 271 deputies to unseat Phibun by political means, is believed to be under pressure from his supporters to reach for top money now.
 - C. Despite the existence of bad blood among Thailand's ruling triumvirate, current estimate is that chances are about even that they will maintain a working relationship during the next year or so.
 1. In this connection, it is questionable if Sarit, whose health is reliably reported to be failing badly, has the nerve to risk losing everything in a showdown with such a formidable opponent as Phibun.
- II. There are continuing indications that the Thais are feeling pressures to reach an accommodation with Communist China.

DOCUMENT NO. 17
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. FI
IT IS CLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS, S, C
AUTH: HP 30-2
DATE 1-16-80 REVIEWER: 372044

- A. The Bangkok press, including papers controlled by Thailand's leaders, has been increasingly critical of the US during the past year.
 - B. There are also increasing "unofficial" contacts between Thailand and Communist China.
 - 1. As recently as two weeks ago, there were three Thai groups in China - a basketball team, a fifty-man cultural mission, and a nine-man labor delegation.
 - 2. Despite the Thai government's denials, it probably facilitated their travel to China.
 - C. In return, there has recently been an influx of Chinese Communist propaganda films; some high-ranking Thai officials have shared in the profits.
- XIII. Although there is likely to be an increase in these contacts, they do not foreshadow Thailand's adoption of a neutral foreign policy.
- A. It is more likely that they reflect the traditional Thai penchant for hedging bets, and we believe that Thailand will probably continue for at least the next year or two a generally anti-Communist foreign policy, including association with the US in collective defense measures.

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